

Soldiers *Online*



Sea-Tested Sold

TUGBOATS strained as they pulled the amphibious assault ship *USS Tarawa* away from her pier, and as the San Diego skyline passed in the background, curious soldiers watched the sailors rush through tasks on deck to get the ship underway. This was certainly not the usual method of deployment for members of the Texas Army National Guard.

SFC Brenda Benner is a member of the 100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Texas Army National Guard.

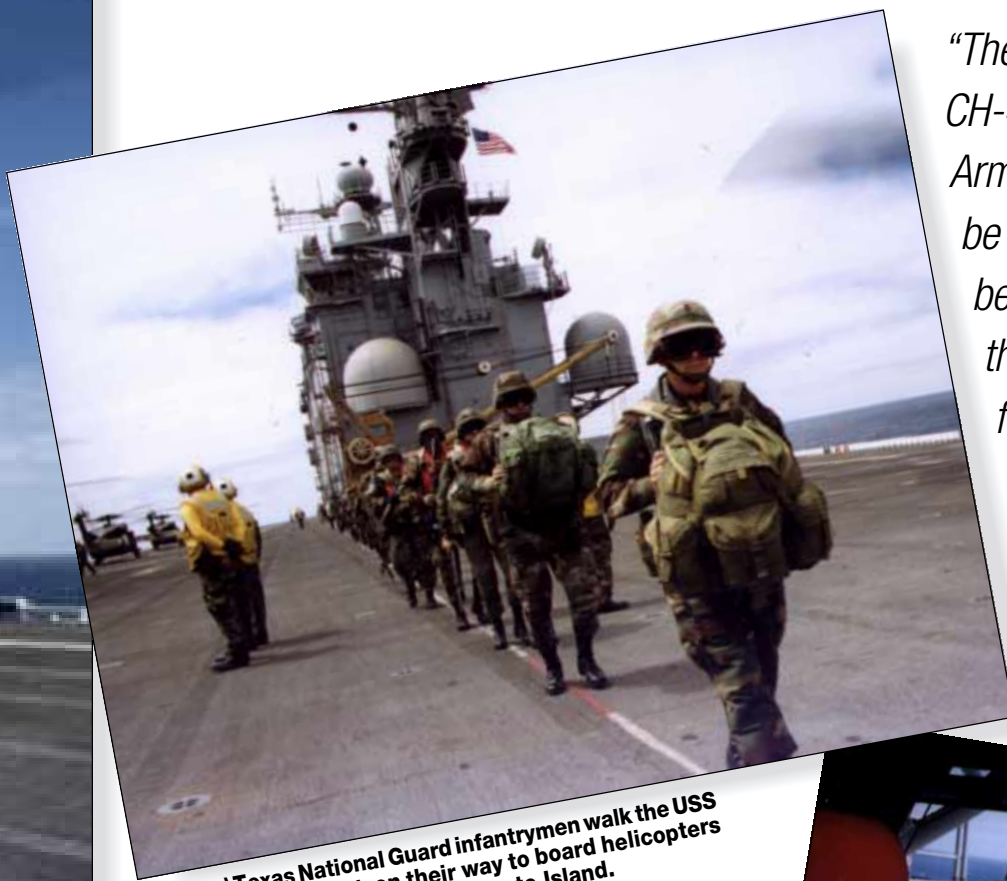
The Texas aviators and infantrymen from the 49th Armored Division were aboard *Tarawa* to participate in the sixth of 12 dedicated at-sea tests of the Joint Shipboard Helicopter Integration Process.

The JSHIP evaluates the integration of non-Navy rotorcraft aboard air-capable Navy vessels. The Department of Defense uses the resulting evaluations of multi-service at-sea air operations to recommend changes in joint tactics, techniques and procedures

involving non-Navy units.

According to JSHIP's Navy deputy director, Cmdr. Bret Gary, DAST 6 was to be unlike any of its predecessors. It would be the first time UH-60 Black Hawks, CH-47 Chinooks and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters would train over water simultaneously.

"This time we're filling up *Tarawa's* deck", said Gary. "We'll go beyond what we've accomplished in the past by evaluating all of the staff coordination — the people side of how



(Above) Texas National Guard infantrymen walk the USS Tarawa's flight deck on their way to board helicopters for their insertion on San Clemente Island.

(Left) Aircraft handlers guide an AH-64 Apache off Tarawa's flight deck.

(Right) CW5 Jack Hyde, a UH-60 Black Hawk pilot and brigade standardization officer, coordinates flights with Navy air traffic controllers from his perch in Tarawa's flight-operations center.



"The Navy is phasing out its CH-46 helicopters, so the Army's CH-47 Chinooks will be needed more than before. If we can show that the Army and Navy can function together on ships, that will help us develop more options for future missions..."

iers

Story and photos by SFC Brenda Benner

we do business."

Another change was the inclusion of infantrymen, who used *Tarawa* as an amphibious base in preparation for their flight to San Clemente Island for a training mission with Navy SEALs.

JSHIP and the numerous DASTs also serve as opportunities for Army aviators to earn or renew their flight-deck qualifications.

"Future conflicts and crises will most likely require Army helicopters to work off Navy ships," said SSG

Doug Kimberlin, a CH-47 Chinook flight-engineer instructor from the 149th Aviation Regiment, explaining the importance of ship flight-deck qualification.

"The Navy is phasing out its CH-46 helicopters, so the Army's CH-47 Chinooks will be needed more than before. If we can show that the Army and Navy can function together on ships, that will help us develop more options for future missions," Kimberlin said.

Citing Army air-mobility shortcomings during operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, CW4 Jim Sandberg of the 149th Avn. Regt. said the JSHIP program and the Navy are offering greater mobility than ever before.

Taking to the air over the Pacific Ocean required the Army pilots to read nautical charts, navigate over open ocean and readjust their actions to conserve fuel, said MAJ Bo Kenyon, operations officer for the aviation brigade.



Texas National Guard armament crews load 2.75-inch rockets aboard an Apache. The operation of Army AH-6 helicopters from Navy vessels during and following the Gulf War proved the tactical value of shipborne Army helicopters.

"This is a history-making mission for our infantry units. It's the first time we've been involved in a joint operation with Army aviation, a Navy ship and the Navy SEALs."

While Army and Navy helicopters are similar, the differences between land-based and sea-based operations have created technical barriers.

An Army Black Hawk and Navy Sea Hawk may look similar, Kenyon said, "but on the inside, Navy helicopters have different communication and navigation systems."

Different vocabulary is yet another barrier that can hamper operations, Kenyon said.

"We have our own 6,000-page volume of acronyms, and so does the Navy," he said. "We have different

names for the same thing. Our 'widget' is their 'gizmo.'"

JSHIP analyst Ron Mann, who specializes in the procedures and training of embarked units, said he noticed all types of incompatibility issues during a typical training day.

He and fellow JSHIP evaluators followed the action with their notebooks ready. They observed detailed communications between Navy and Army air-operations staffs, the actions of personnel on the flight deck, the work of maintenance crews and the adaptability of the infantrymen, who

were on board for the first time.

Issues would occasionally arise that had no immediate solutions. But more often, the problems and the methods to correct them were easily determined when sailors and soldiers worked together.

"Incompatibility problems can be as simple as identifying the different-sized chains and fasteners used to secure Army versus Navy helicopters to the flight deck," said Mann.

The infantrymen also had to qualify for their over-water mission, by completing combat water survival



AH-64 Apache mechanic SGT Daniel Philipp holds the rotor blades steady while weapons crews load rockets aboard the attack helicopter.

qualification before being manifested for the ship.

Wearing full combat gear, including 35-pound rucksacks, each soldier treaded water, performed the “dead man’s” float and swam the length of an Olympic-sized pool to prove their immediate survivability in water.

“We learned how to pack our rucks in waterproof bags a certain way to stay afloat,” said CPL Doug Vaught. “If the bag leaks, the ruck becomes a bag of rocks. If it starts pulling you under, you’d better get out of it quick and let it go. Luckily, I did everything right, because I didn’t drown.”

“My soldiers have been really pumped up about this mission since day one,” said LTC Lester Simpson, the infantry commander. “This is a history-making mission for our infantry units. It’s the first time we’ve been involved in a joint operation with Army aviation, a Navy ship and the Navy SEALs.

These guys have exciting stories to tell their buddies when we return home.” □

“My soldiers have been really pumped up about this mission since day one,” said LTC Lester Simpson, the infantry commander.



PFC Adalberto Ramirez retorques the tail rotor outboard retention plats on a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter sitting on Tarawa's deck.



Apaches circle overhead to provide overwatch protection for infantrymen during the soldiers' first few minutes on San Clemente Island.

Getting Lost on *The Tarawa*

Story by SFC Brenda Benner



Soldiers and sailors serve their country together, but rarely side by side. Often, members within the ranks of these two distinctly different services will go years before crossing paths with one another. And, if not for the annual Army-Navy football game rivalry, they would seldom gather en masse.

Sailors and soldiers often know very little of each other's missions and experiences, and are as unfamiliar with the other's military culture as they would be with that of a foreign service.

Active-duty sailors and Texas Army National Guard infantrymen broke down some of those cultural barriers during the JSHIP exercises.

Seaman John Domil, a line handler aboard USS *Tarawa*, said he has much love for the Army, based on his dad's 20-year career as a soldier. But he admitted he needed to study the rank insignias again — no sailor wants to be caught saluting a private.

"Having all these Army guys on ship is new to me; it's surprising," said Domil. "My advice to them is to try to hold down their meals, keep their eyes and ears open, be alert, be safe and enjoy the ride. I'll help out by looking for confused looks. It's easy to tell when someone is lost."

Getting lost on *Tarawa* was such a common occurrence that virtually every soldier was lost at one time or

another as they navigated the ship's multi-level labyrinth. Every door and specific work area has its own unique address, known as a bull's eye, but finding their target destination was often challenging.

"Getting around the ship was confusing for me," said combat medic SSG Tim Schickedanz. "Sometimes you have to go down a level or two and cross over to actually go up. I've certainly been walking around lost more than I expected to."

SPC Richard Higgins, a cavalry scout, was excited about his first mission aboard the ship. At first, he didn't know what to expect when he walked up *Tarawa's* gangplank.

"Overall, it's a lot more spacious inside than I expected," said Higgins. "This ship is huge. Although we're racking pretty tight down in the living quarters, it's comfortable and cozy. It's much better than being in the woods; at least I have air conditioning here."

Being lost was the least of worries for several soldiers. While some adjusted to the constant rocking of the amphibious assault ship, others had trouble finding their sea legs.

"I got sick the very first day," said SPC Omar Hernandez. "They had to take me up top, outside so I could see the horizon. I felt better after that. I don't know how sailors can take this week after week."

Sailors and soldiers swapped stories and learned about each other's job specialties during meals in the crowded galley. Many held jobs that the others never knew existed.

Sometimes, their specialties were the same, but named differently.

Story by story, meal by meal, the barriers of unfamiliarity were chipped away.

Speaking of meals, many of the soldiers were more impressed with the meals than most anything else related to the ship. As infantrymen, they are used to the infamous prepackaged "meals — ready to eat."

"I can't believe how much wonderful food is offered at every meal," said Higgins. "If I was on this ship for six months, I'd be the size of a whale. The food is great, plus there's no chiggers, scorpions or snakes to worry about."

As the mission wrapped up, the soldiers and sailors had learned much in just a few days.

Schickedanz said that both the Army and the Navy have their own set of perks and shortcomings.

"The sailors I've talked with say they can't see themselves out in the boonies with the snakes," he said. "But I can't imagine being on a ship and seeing nothing but water for months at a time. This ship is too claustrophobic for me. I'd go crazy. I don't know how they do it, but to each his own." □